DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 972 UD 034 985

AUTHOR	Gardner, John
TITLE	How School Choice Helps the Milwaukee Public Schools.
PUB DATE	2002-01-00
NOTE	34p.; Produced by the American Education Reform Council, Milwaukee, WI.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.schoolchoiceinfo.org/research/research.jsp?c=2.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Enrollment Trends; Expenditure per Student; Low Income Groups; *Public Schools; *School Choice; Scores; Standardized Tests; State Aid; Student Evaluation; Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	*Milwaukee Public Schools WI

ABSTRACT

Parents in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have more tax-supported educational choices than parents in other cities. Most programs were enacted during the 1990s. Opponents believed these programs would harm the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), but 11 years of data show positive trends. MPS enrollment increased by 4,576 students since 1990. Real spending per pupil grew 24 percent. The state share of spending for MPS grew from 54 to 67 percent. Overall academic achievement remained unacceptably low in MPS. Nevertheless, MPS students made significant academic gains between 1997-2001, when the most rapid expansion of school choice occurred. On independent standardized exams, MPS students improved on 11 of 15 tests compared to a national sample. The percent of MPS students demonstrating proficiency on all 15 tests increased. The dropout rate declined. The learning gains coincided with and reflected systemwide changes within MPS. Expanded school choice prompted a positive response from many MPS schools (dollars follow students, so schools must recruit to strengthen their budgets, teachers are now often hired by school selection committees, and working with private and charter schools, MPS has expanded facilities in central city neighborhoods). The impact of these changes is particularly strong on low-income, minority children. (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 464 972

How School Choice Helps the Milwaukee Public Schools

John Gardner

Member at Large
Board of School Directors
Milwaukee Public Schools

January 2002

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Winger
American Education Reform Council

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

UD 034 985

AMERICAN EDUCATION REFORM COUNCIL

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parents in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, have more tax-supported educational choices than parents in other U.S. cities. Most of these programs were enacted during the 1990s.

Opponents believed these programs would harm the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), the nation's twelfth largest public school system. They predicted enrollment declines, less state education aid to MPS, budget reductions, and lower academic performance for remaining MPS students.

None of these predictions has come true. In fact, eleven years of data show opposite trends. MPS enrollment has increased by 4,576 students since 1990. The MPS market share has grown to 80 percent from 78 percent of K-12 Milwaukee students. Real spending per pupil has grown 24 percent. State support for MPS – adjusted for inflation – has risen 61 percent. As a result, the state share of spending for MPS has grown to 67 percent from 54 percent.

MPS remains a district where overall academic achievement is unacceptably low. The percent of MPS freshmen who get diplomas is among the nation's lowest, especially among African American and Hispanic students. Nothing in this report should be construed to suggest anything but that much progress is still needed.

Nevertheless, the evidence is increasingly clear that MPS students have made significant academic gains between 1997 and 2001, the period of the most rapid expansion of school choice. On independent standardized exams, MPS students improved on eleven of fifteen tests where their performance was compared to a national sample. The percent of MPS students demonstrating proficiency on all fifteen tests has increased. The too-high dropout rate is declining. These developments have occurred at the same time that the number of MPS students from low-income families was growing, a trend some observers associate with the likelihood of lower achievement.

The evidence is increasingly clear that MPS students have made significant academic gains between 1997 and 2001, the period of the most rapid expansion of school choice.

The learning gains coincide with and reflect important, system-wide changes within MPS. Expanded school choice has prompted a positive response from many MPS schools, a response accompanied by internal pressure for changes that have proven nearly impossible to implement in most other major urban districts. For example:

- Dollars follow students to schools they choose, so that schools must recruit to strengthen their budgets. Individual schools control 95 percent of district operating funds.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD 1

PROLOGUE 3

I. "PUBLIC EDUCATION": WHAT'S AT STAKE, AND OPPOSING VIEWS 7

II. PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL CHOICE IN MILWAUKEE – THEN AND NOW 10

Table 1. New Tax-Supported School Choice Options in Milwaukee, 1990-2002 12

III. REAL CHANGE 13

IV. RESULTS 15

Figure 1. K-12 Enrollment in Milwaukee, 1990 v. 2001 16

Figure 2. Real Per Pupil Spending, MPS, 1990-2001 ($2001) 17

Figure 3. State Aid to MPS as a Percentage of MPS Spending 18

Figure 4. MPS Enrollment Changes, 1991-2001 19

Table 2. Change in MPS Student Scores, Compared to a National Sample, between 1996-97 and 2000-01 20

Figure 5. Change in 4th Grade MPS Test Scores, National Percentile Ranking, 1997 v. 2001 (Scale = 1-99) 20

Figure 6. Change in 8th Grade MPS Test Scores, National Percentile Ranking, 1997 v. 2001 (Scale = 1-99) 21

Figure 7. Change in 10th Grade MPS Test Scores, National Percentile Ranking, 1997 v. 2001 (Scale = 1-99) 21

Table 3. Percent of MPS Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on WKCE Tests, 1997-98 v. *2000-01* 22

Figure 8. Change in Average MPS Grade Equivalent Scores, 1997 v. 2001 22

V. CAUSE AND EFFECT 23

CONCLUSION 25

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 27

FOREWORD

Since the mid-1990s, the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has required that all high school students study algebra. In 1995, MPS began requiring that high school students take a demanding mathematics proficiency test. District officials did not sugarcoat the grim initial results, which the national media widely disseminated. After only 12 percent passed the math test when it was first administered, then-U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich said the results signaled nothing less than a "decline in civilization."

Now, several years later, the fanfare has died down and MPS student performance has improved. In math, for example, more than 90 percent of MPS seniors now pass the proficiency test, part of a comprehensive set of exams that must be passed in order to graduate.

Math is one of many areas where MPS students are learning more and performing better. Their performance, described in this report, illustrates the response by Milwaukee educators to the city's new environment for public education. Milwaukee parents now have a broader range of educational options than exist in any other American city, as well as increased grounds for confidence in Milwaukee Public Schools. MPS still has a long way to go – its graduation rate for African Americans and Hispanics is among the country's lowest – but the evidence is clear that the district is on a course of real improvement.

Milwaukee parents now have a broader range of educational options than exist in any other American city, as well as increased grounds for confidence in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Like John Gardner, each of us has devoted a great deal of our personal and professional energy to strengthening the educational achievement of urban students. That goal cannot be achieved without a strong system of public education. Milwaukee is on track to meet that goal. We all feel accountable to ourselves and our community for actually achieving it. We hope our experience encourages those in other cities who also are working so hard to raise the achievement of urban students.

Howard Fuller
Former MPS Superintendent

Joe Dannecker
Director, MPS Board

Ken Johnson
Director, MPS Board

Jeff Spence
Director, MPS Board

1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PROLOGUE

Public Education — A History of Revolutionary Changes

"School choice" has become the shorthand description of a bristling and potentially historic debate about America's evolving commitment to public education.[1]

A central issue in the debate is whether educational options for poor parents will expand beyond those traditionally available to them. These options include the current hot-button issue of whether low-income parents may use educational vouchers to send their children to schools traditionally regarded as "private" or "parochial."

The school choice debate echoes earlier conflicts that, taken together, comprise sequential democratic revolutions in American public education.

The school choice debate echoes earlier conflicts that, taken together, comprise sequential democratic revolutions in American public education. A host of progressive public education policies now taken for granted emerged from polarized constituencies in open conflict. At the time, each revolution appeared as either a "bold step forward" or the possible "destruction of public education," depending on the participant's bias. These revolutions have permanently endowed our national history and culture, continually redefining what public education means, absorbing within it new constituencies, and resulting in more tax support to universities, K-12 schools, and early childhood education.

Just as in the current school choice debate, prior revolutions in public education involved controversy, polarization, and vigorous conflict in the public square. Consider:

- The establishment of "common schools;"
- The creation of state universities;
- The Homestead and Morrill acts' extension of public education to frontier settlements;
- The creation of schools for Native Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics;
- State funding for schools;
- The modern era of federal educational programs, ranging from the GI Bill and Pell Grants for university students to Head Start and Title I for early childhood education;

---

1 By "school choice" I mean programs designed to expand K-12 educational options, especially new options for low-income urban parents. These include public charter schools, educational vouchers that can be used at private schools, public-private educational partnerships, and new educational choices within the traditional public school system.

- Racial integration; and
- Gender equity in sports.

Such examples illustrate an evolving culture of American public education based on policies, now widely accepted, that often originated as eccentric local experiments. They spawned unlikely coalitions of opposition and support. Opposing factions sometimes sustained generations of acrimonious battles at all levels of government, from local school boards to national legislative debates. In the end, some even provoked pivotal judicial review, culminating at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Milwaukee offers the most comprehensive available evidence of how school choice actually operates in a city where low-income families traditionally have had few educational options.

Milwaukee's Untold Story: The Next Revolution

Another revolution is in the making. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision to review the Cleveland, Ohio, voucher program in February 2002 makes expanded school choice for low-income parents the next potential watershed in American public education. The Court's ruling could affect K-12 education for decades and, as a consequence, shape American history and culture. Accordingly, the experience of Milwaukee — which *Education Week* calls "ground zero" for urban education reform — is nationally instructive.

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), enacted in 1990, is the nation's oldest and largest tax-supported voucher program for low-income students. It is but one element of the K-12 public education scene that makes Milwaukee the nation's largest and most diverse school choice laboratory.

Milwaukee offers the most comprehensive available evidence of how school choice actually operates in a city where low-income families traditionally have had few educational options. The evidence, which I summarize, directly addresses what a new RAND report calls the need to understand the effects of school choice on those who continue to attend more traditional public schools.[2] Depending on the Supreme Court's Cleveland ruling, the Milwaukee story offers a future look at how American public education might be revolutionized. The Milwaukee experience also shows how far American public education must go to provide the kind of multi-sector school choice policies regarded as normal by the rest of the world, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and most of Western Europe.

More fundamentally, Milwaukee demonstrates how urban public education might fulfill the elementary yet revolutionary vision of Kenneth B. Clarke, the psychologist and civil rights leader whose 1954 testimony proved decisive in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Dr. Clark, at a 1967 civil rights conference, declared that "public education need not be identified with the present system…of public schools. [It] can be more broadly and pragmatically defined in terms of…an education system which is in the public interest."[3]

More than any other American city, Milwaukee is moving in the direction identified by Clark, providing tangible evidence as to what happens when enough students and

2 Brian P. Gill, et al., *Rhetoric Versus Reality: What We Know and What We Need to Know About Vouchers and Charter Schools*, RAND Education, Santa Monica, 2001.

- Teachers – once assigned almost strictly by seniority – are now often hired by school selection committees.
- MPS has expanded dramatically the full-day four-year-old kindergarten programs in high demand by parents.
- Working with private and charter schools, MPS has expanded facilities in central city neighborhoods, once neglected in favor of school construction in predominantly white areas and suburbs.

The positive results in Milwaukee have both caused and coincided with a dramatic change in how citizens view public education.

The impact of these changes is particularly strong on low-income children in racial and ethnic minority groups. These are children who were often left behind in earlier reform efforts.

The positive results in Milwaukee have both caused and coincided with a dramatic change in how citizens view public education. Indeed, Milwaukee has redefined the concept and has shown that competitive, multi-sector delivery strengthens, rather than threatens, public education, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and democratic civic culture.

schools, with enough political and financial support, generate wholesale changes in urban K-12 education. The range of new options available to Milwaukee families both amplifies and challenges conventional "public education" and "free market" arguments associated with giving urban parents choices beyond traditional public school programs.

Notwithstanding considerable extant research and publicity,[4] Milwaukee's real story is untold. School choice in Milwaukee embodies a fundamental redefinition of public education. Nevertheless, Milwaukee's new paradigm is decidedly a work in progress. Fundamental challenges remain: academic achievement and graduation rates are too low; post-graduate success for low-income students is too limited; and the demands of a changing labor market compound these conditions.

Until and unless the changes happening in Milwaukee lead to substantial improvement in the careers and civic lives of high school graduates, no celebrations are in order. What I argue is that there are positive signs that the changes likely to produce such results are occurring in Milwaukee. These truly revolutionary changes are unprecedented in any other major urban district and unimaginable in most.

Organization of this Paper

In Section I, I discuss and challenge the conventional definition of "public education." I describe how school choice supports a broadened definition of public education, and what is at stake in the school choice debate. And, as neutrally as my own opinions permit, I describe the major opposing views.

Section II compares public educational options available now in Milwaukee with those that existed before enactment in 1990 of the MPCP.

This leads to a description, in Section III, of fundamental changes in public education offerings that have accompanied the growth of school choice in Milwaukee. The system-wide changes in the way MPS operates, I contend, would not have occurred without the introduction of true school choice.

Section IV demonstrates that eleven years of expanded school choice in Milwaukee have coincided with: enrollment growth in MPS schools; improvement in MPS's fiscal condition; and increased academic achievement by MPS students. I argue in Section V that these results are not mere coincidences, but that these changes are the result of the

The range of new options available to Milwaukee families both amplifies and challenges conventional "public education" and "free market" arguments associated with giving urban parents choices beyond traditional public school programs.

3 From "Alternative Public School Systems," a paper Clark presented at the National Conference on Equal Educational Opportunities in America's Cities, sponsored by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, November 16-18, 1967.

4 The MPCP has generated an extraordinary variety and volume of peer-reviewed research, media coverage, testimony, and legal opinion. National newspapers and broadcast media outlets have featured stories on the program. It has generated widespread local and state media coverage in Wisconsin for more than a decade, generating more legislative debate, public testimony, and public relations battles than any educational issue in memory. A multitude of court cases challenging the program have documented more expert witness testimony than any other public policy dispute in the state. Formal academic research includes seven state-sponsored evaluations, by two different research teams, and three additional studies, by separate teams at Harvard University and Princeton University. Much of this information is available at www.SchoolChoiceInfo.org.

positive impact of expanded educational options.

I conclude that Milwaukee's democratic revolution in redefining American public education has strengthened all educational sectors, including Milwaukee Public Schools, surrounding districts, all denominations of religious schools, and all varieties of independent schools. Finally, I argue that we need to move beyond debates about who should or should not be included within a definition of American public education. We instead should attend to the more pressing task of ensuring effective instruction and necessary enculturation for the poor urban children who remain tragically tracked for failure within obsolete, failed governmental monopolies that are as outmoded as they are unjust.

I. "Public Education": What's at Stake, and Opposing Views

The school choice controversy is so enmeshed in loyalties - and fury - surrounding "public education" that the very terms of debate obscure meaning and connotation. Indeed, the words "public eduction" mean different things to different people.

One conventional view of K-12 public education involves tax-funded, free-of-charge schools owned and operated by government monopolies with specific boundaries called "districts." Schools within districts are governed by elected or appointed boards of directors, and are subject to local, state, and federal regulation.[5]

That view is not universally shared, especially among those who have observed decades of substandard performance in urban public schools. Many of them embrace the view, as described earlier, that Dr. Clark stated several decades ago. As Clark bluntly observed, the widespread educational failure of students in most urban school systems hardly serves the public interest.

Milwaukee is a laboratory, if you will, for developing a K-12 public education system that operates in the public interest.

What's happening in Milwaukee is best understood in the broader perspective offered by Dr. Clark. Milwaukee is a laboratory, if you will, for developing a K-12 public education system that operates in the public interest.

In its 2002 decision on the Cleveland voucher program, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively will decide whether Milwaukee, Cleveland, and other cities may redefine public education to mean tax-funded, free-of-charge education sponsored by governmental, independent, and religious sectors, through a variety of financial and organizational means.

The Court also will address a fundamental issue of equity: will American school choice finally embrace the poor? For too long, the school choice debate has obscured rather than highlighted the starkly different educational options available to the poor, especially in major cities, and those accessible to most Americans.

As scholars Richard Elmore and Bruce Fuller explain: "Choice is everywhere in American education. It is manifest in the residential choices made by families [and] in the

---

5 This definition of public education is both nationally and historically distinctive. I know of no other nation that specifically excludes independent private or religious schools from its definition or operation of public education. Nor did the United States until the middle of the twentieth century, and then neither uniformly nor completely. Vermont and Maine funded religious schools in remote, sparsely populated villages until 1963. Iowa funds traditionalist Amish schools to this day. MPS's contract with the St. Charles Center for Children, for high school students just out of jail, dates back to 1968.

housing prices found in neighborhoods [and] when families, sometimes at great financial sacrifice, decide to send their children to private schools....[I]n all instances, these choices...are strongly shaped by the wealth, ethnicity, and social status of parents and their neighborhoods."[6]

Similarly, Jeffrey Henig and Stephen Sugarman describe the "very considerable degree to which families already select the schools their children attend....[B]y one plausible way of counting, more than half of American families now exercise school choice [and] some families have more choice than others."[7]

At the heart of the school choice debate is the issue of whether low-income parents should enjoy at least some of the choices long presumed by middle- and upper-income parents.

Those who say "yes" argue that school choice can reform and reshape failing public school systems that have resisted or subverted every other reform effort. They note that many other tax-supported public services – higher education from vocational schools to universities, the federal early childhood Head Start program, transportation, health care and housing – benefit from multi-sector provision. To school choice advocates, multiple education providers embody the pluralism that constitutes a fundamental principle of democratic openness in American political and civic life. In addition, they argue, multiple providers create external challenges through both market competition and political alternatives to governmental monopolies that have failed significant numbers of students. They further assert that new schooling alternatives, market competition, and sustained political challenges to the status quo together can improve a critical public service that has failed poor people, recent immigrants, and racial minorities in urban America and elsewhere.

At the heart of the school choice debate is the issue of whether low-income parents should enjoy at least some of the choices long presumed by middle- and upper-income parents.

Opponents argue with equal conviction that school choice for low-income families diverts attention and resources from the more fundamental issue of the budgets, facilities, and support that existing public schools require. They cite crumbling facilities, compensation inadequate to attract the needed number and quality of teachers, large class sizes, and unjust fiscal disparities between rich and poor districts as reasons that the existing urban public education system needs all the resources it can get. Opponents of school choice cite commitments to equity and uniformity through government provision of educational services to all as fundamental to the nation's democratic ideals. These democratic ideals, they argue, are jeopardized by the market ideology advanced by some choice supporters. In addition, they fear that school choice might Balkanize society.

The controversy evokes cultural issues beyond education. Passionate convictions about racial justice, cultural diversity, and the appropriate role of religious institutions in American public life generate unexpected coalitions and allegiances. The debate does not divide neatly along racial lines; concerned people of color join both sides. Some racial minorities believe that the institutional accountability to parents

---

6 *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1996.

7 *School Choice and Social Controversy: Politics, Policy and Law*, Sugarman and Kemerer, eds., The Brookings Institution Press, 1999.

inherent in a system of expanded school choice is the only way to develop institutions that prepare their children for the requirements of success in mainstream culture and sustain distinctive cultural heritages and identities. Others argue with equal conviction that school choice threatens to re-segregate America, intensifying inequities of money, facilities, and quality for predominantly African-American, Hispanic, and Native American communities, districts and schools.

Opinions regarding multiculturalism parallel those about race and broaden the discussion to include affinities of language, ethnicity, curriculum, and learning style. Some multiculturalists argue that only school choice offers sub-cultures the ability to transmit their cultural identities to children, preserving distinctive communities in a larger culture dominated by overwhelming linguistic, commercial, and media assimilation. Others, equally committed to multiculturalism, argue that only governmental schools will have the necessary funds, buildings, broad constituency, and commitment to democratic ideals to impart multicultural experience and values not merely to isolated segments of the population, but to everyone.

Religion is inescapably intertwined with both racial and multicultural debates, for many distinctive racial and cultural communities identify with specific religions and denominations. Some Jewish, Christian, and Islamic orthodoxies cannot functionally separate education from specific linguistic, curricular, or calendar requirements and therefore expect religion to be part of their child's educational experience. Among many subcultures, religious institutions and community provide the only safe shelter, institutional autonomy, and continuous tradition in their histories and lives, and they therefore support the inclusion of religious schools in school choice options. Other supporters of religious school inclusion within school choice cite the more immediate consideration of capacity. In many regions, religious schools offer the only widely available, or expandable, alternative to governmental schools. Opponents of religious school inclusion in school choice programs base their argument on the belief that public money should not be supporting religious institutions. The separation of church and state is a founding principle of our country, and many opponents of vouchers don't want religious dogma in publicly funded schools.

In many regions, religious schools offer the only widely available, or expandable, alternative to governmental schools.

With such pivotal issues at stake, the Court's upcoming decision clearly will be momentous. Depending on the specifics of the Court's ruling, America will effectively have new ground-rules for what is "public education." If the Court lets parents voluntarily use public support to choose religious schools, it will give confidence and encouragement to voucher initiatives already operating, and spur new ones in many localities and states. If the inclusion of religious schools is ruled unconstitutional, school choice proponents will have to find other, significantly more difficult, means to generate alternatives outside educational governmental monopolies for low-income parents.

II. Public Educational Choice in Milwaukee – Then and Now

MPS is the nation's twelfth largest urban school district. In little more than a decade, tax-supported educational choices available to the district's residents have changed fundamentally. The range of new choices began with the 1990 enactment of the MPCP.

Pre-1990

In the 1970s and 1980s the Milwaukee educational scene was dominated first by litigation involving school desegregation and then by implementation of a "forced choice" school assignment plan developed to reduce segregation.[8]

During these years, the State of Wisconsin provided *billions* of dollars in growing financial support for MPS, an investment with no strings attached as far as learning outcomes were concerned. From 1977 to 1989 alone, state aid to MPS totaled $1.8 billion, including $335 million to help implement desegregation. MPS, for its part, initiated a series of long-term plans, often accompanied by labels and acronyms (i.e., "Project RISE") that lulled some community leaders into thinking that reform was afoot.

From 1977 to 1989 alone, state aid to MPS totaled $1.8 billion, including $335 million to help implement desegregation.

Not everyone was convinced. Various community groups and parents disputed the MPS efforts and the public claims about rising academic achievement. They claimed that the desegregation plan had a disproportionate and unfair impact on African-American children and families. They also argued that district achievement data obscured low achievement among African-American students.

During the mid- to late-1980s, three studies conducted independently of MPS validated these critics.[9] Despite ongoing MPS claims to the contrary, the independent

---

8 For most students, available options were dictated by racial integration mandates imposed by federal courts in 1976. For a minority of MPS students, there also was a nationally recognized "specialty" or "magnet" program that relied heavily on selective admission practices. It attempted to create voluntary racial diversity through attractive programs such as Montessori, language immersion, and arts and academic specialties, among others. A few specialties flourished as attractive options for achieving racial integration and academic achievement. Other specialties generated some parental demand, but no accompanying integration or academic achievement. In time, some specialty schools functionally reverted to neighborhood status because parents outside the neighborhood failed to choose them. Others retained their specialty status in name only. In addition to the magnet schools, a voluntary transfer program with suburban districts was meant to aid in racial integration.

evidence showed that academic achievement was declining or at best stagnant, and certainly not improving.

Growing numbers of parents, organizations, and community leaders responded with political urgency to the accumulating evidence. Through the sponsorship of Democratic Milwaukee State Rep. Annette "Polly" Williams, legislation creating a new school district for a majority of African-American students actually cleared the State Assembly. While that bill ultimately was not enacted, it fueled a separate legislative effort led by Williams and then-Gov. Tommy Thompson to expand educational choices available to Milwaukee parents. With critical support from Democratic State Sen. Gary George, this culminated in the 1990 enactment of the MPCP.

Today

The range of tax-supported educational options available today bears little comparison to the situation in 1990. Real choices now include:

- Traditional neighborhood MPS schools;
- A much expanded list of popular MPS specialty schools;
- A growing number of "contract" or "partnership" schools, many of which specialize in helping at-risk students;
- New MPS district-wide open enrollment schools;
- New MPS charter schools;
- Seven charter schools independent of MPS authorized by the City of Milwaukee and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee;
- More than 100 independent and religious schools in the MPCP; and
- A state open enrollment program that gives more Milwaukee residents a way to attend other public school districts.

The range of tax-supported educational options available today bears little comparison to the situation in 1990.

Tens of thousands of students and families are directly affected by these developments. In the table on the next page, I estimate that more than 43,400 Milwaukee children now use tax support to attend schools that either (i) didn't exist a decade ago or (ii) that they could not have afforded to attend.

---

9 These three studies were: (i) a doctoral thesis by Howard Fuller (who later served as MPS Superintendent) documenting the disproportionate burden on African-Americans of the forced choice desegregation plan; (ii) the report of a state commission, created by the Governor and Superintendent of Public Instruction, documenting low levels of academic achievement by African-American students and a wide gap between those students and white students; and (iii) a separate report from the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute documenting continuing low levels of academic achievement and the beginning signs of resegregation in MPS.

Table 1. New Tax-Supported School Choice Options in Milwaukee, 1990-2002

New Options Since 1990	2001-02 Enrollment
Open Enrollment in Other School Districts	1,500
New MPS Partnership Schools	2,400
New MPS Specialty, Early Childhood, and K-8 Schools	18,000
New MPS Charter Schools	7,000
Private Independent and Religious Schools (MPSP)	10,900
New Charter Schools Authorized by City of Milwaukee and UW-Milwaukee	3,600
Total	*43,400*

Those using these new options represent a third of the K-12 students n the City of Milwaukee.

Those using these new options represent a third of the K-12 students in the City of Milwaukee. As I describe in the following sections, this number is but one wave in the sea-change of reform occurring in Milwaukee.

III. Real Change

Since 1990, the organization of MPS has undergone a true shift, with much power previously controlled by a central bureaucracy having been transferred to individual schools and parents. The magnitude of this change is unprecedented in contemporary American urban schools. Indeed, the public education scene in Milwaukee is vastly different than in other American cities. The changes are more than embryonic; they already reflect a fundamental redefinition of traditional public education. What the rest of the nation debates in theory is already happening in Milwaukee.

Observation and evidence suggest a strong link between these changes, the expansion of public educational choice, and the resulting new systemic paradigm Milwaukee represents. The expansion of choice has prompted a positive response from many MPS schools, which in turn generated internal pressure for the comprehensive, systemic changes that have proven impossible in other major urban districts. Here are various examples of what has happened:

- Schools can no longer rely on cost-to-continue budgets. Dollars follow students to schools they attend. Schools must actively recruit students to make budgets, which has made them more responsive to local communities, more communicative with parents, and more attentive to students.

- Individual MPS schools now control over ninety-five percent of the district's general operating budget. Many spending decisions at schools are made by principals in consultation with elected governance councils that represent parents and teachers.

- Teaching staff – once assigned almost strictly based on seniority – are now hired by school selection committees.

- A new program – jointly managed by the administration and teachers' union – enables substandard teachers either to be retrained or terminated.

- In a similar agreement jointly managed by the administration and the administrators' union, ineffective principals are demoted or persuaded to resign.

- *All* four-year-old kindergarten classes are full-day programs. Before 1990, Milwaukee parents could find all-day four year-old kindergarten only at private, parochial, suburban, and a handful of MPS specialty magnet schools.

- MPS has twenty-six kindergarten through eighth grade (K-8) schools, with

The expansion of choice has prompted a positive response from many MPS schools, which in turn generated internal pressure for the comprehensive, systemic changes that have proven impossible in major urban districts.

twenty-two more planned. Despite the popularity of such schools in Milwaukee, there were only twelve before 1990.

- Ninety-six schools serve more than 46,000 students in before- and after-school child care and youth recreation programs. In 1990, only one MPS school provided such services.

The decentralized and more accountable system illustrates tangibly how a broader vision and definition of public education can help strengthen both schooling and urban communities.

- Since 1990, the State of Wisconsin, City of Milwaukee, and MPS have invested more than $200 million in new, expanded, and reconditioned facilities, and have plans to spend $100 million more. That does not include more than $75 million in private investment at independent charter schools and in private MPCP schools. The bulk of these investments are in central city neighborhoods, once neglected in favor of school construction in predominantly white areas and suburbs.

- Traditional institutional barriers are often hard to see; some have disintegrated entirely:

  - Youth service agencies such as the YMCA and Boys' and Girls' Clubs routinely consider whether or not to build schools as part of new facilities.

  - Child care centers operate within schools, and grow into schools.

  - Religious congregations and MPS collaborate in the design, building, and operation of schools.

  - Schools, youth service agencies, church congregations collaborate to provide child care, education, youth recreation, health care, social services, and facilities for sports, family gatherings, worship, and adult education.

The reforms inherent in this new organization of public education have changed and strengthened educational services for Milwaukee's children and families. The impact is especially strong on low-income, central city, racial minority, and non-English speaking children. The decentralized and more accountable system illustrates tangibly how a broader vision and definition of public education can help strengthen both schooling and urban communities. This, ultimately, is school choice's most important impact.

IV. RESULTS

The Milwaukee public education system provides evidence regarding the rhetorical and ideological sparring that pits free market theory against more traditional definitions of public education. Consider three assumptions about the supposed effects of school choice:

- School choice causes an "exodus" of students, crippling the ability of public schools to provide services.
- Enrollment declines resulting from school choice create state aid reductions and public school budget reductions.
- The public schools are left with the hardest-to-educate children. Academic achievement among these children and schools declines.

These assumptions are widely shared without regard for overwhelming evidence in Milwaukee that shows they are not true.

In the eleven years since the onset of expanded school choice, MPS enrollment has increased, not declined.

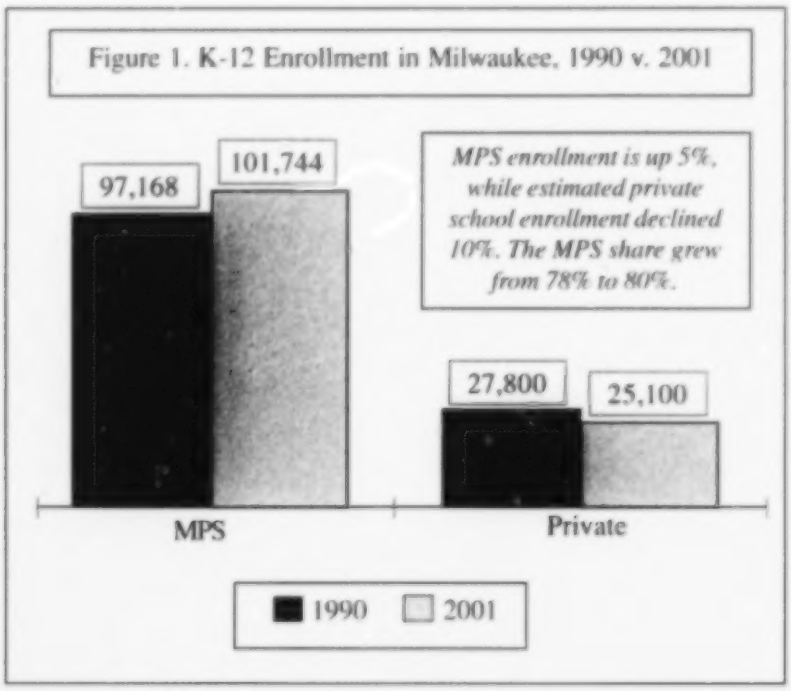
Enrollment

An annual MPS census of children aged 4 to 19 in Milwaukee identifies whether they attend public or private schools. In the eleven years since the onset of expanded school choice, MPS enrollment has increased, not declined. See Figure 1 on the next page.[10]

---

10 The census of private school students does not indicate whether 18- and 19-year olds are in K-12 schools or in college. Reflecting residential patterns near private colleges, I have estimated that 95% of private school children in the census attend K-12 schools whereas the other 5% consist of 18- and 19-year olds at private colleges.

Figure 1 identifies a largely unnoticed trend. During the 1990s, private K-12 enrollment in Milwaukee declined, notwithstanding growth in the MPCP. Given that nearly 10,000 MPCP students were among the 25,100 at private K-12 schools in 2000-01, many of these schools might have closed if the MPCP had not been enacted. Such a finding about the MPCP's impact produces characteristically opposing responses from participants in the school choice debate. MPCP opponents say it proves that the program is needed to prop up schools that otherwise would close. Many MPCP supporters laud the program's role in helping sustain schools that are vital elements in the fabric of many central city neighborhoods.



In terms of total spending and per pupil spending, MPS has experienced substantial increases during the eleven years of the MPCP's existence.

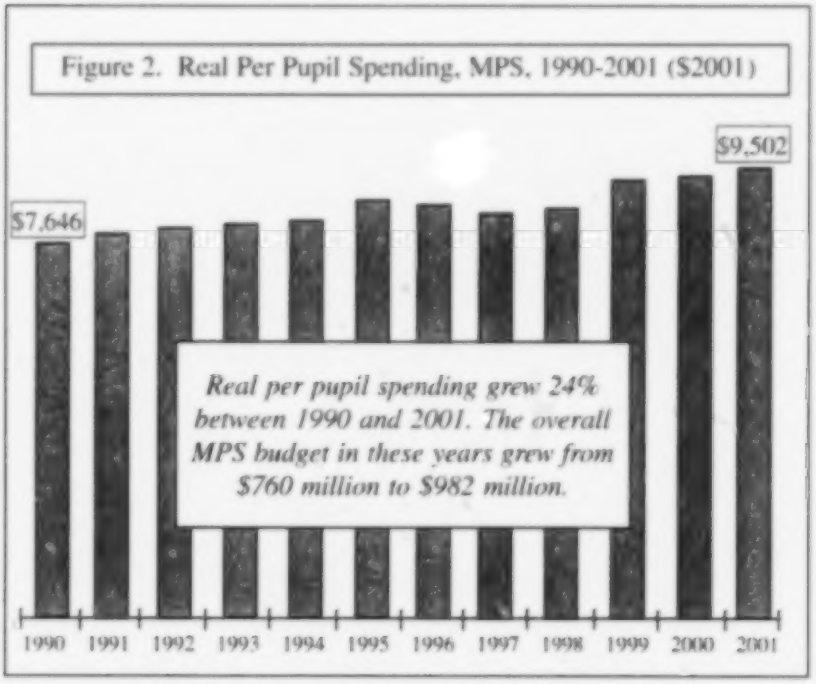
Fiscal Consequences

MPS fiscal reports do not support the frequent claims that the MPCP had caused a reduction in state aid to MPS, along with budget and program cutbacks. MPS publishes annual financial reports with current and historical data on such matters as total spending, per pupil spending, enrollment, sources and amounts of revenue, and the like. I often found myself reviewing these reports during the 1990s, seeking to verify such claims.

The MPS fiscal reports did not support such charges; but opponents' claims often were reported uncritically. Slowly, this has begun to change, but in Milwaukee and elsewhere there are otherwise knowledgeable people who cling firmly to the view that MPS has suffered unfair fiscal consequences because of the MPCP. The facts show otherwise.

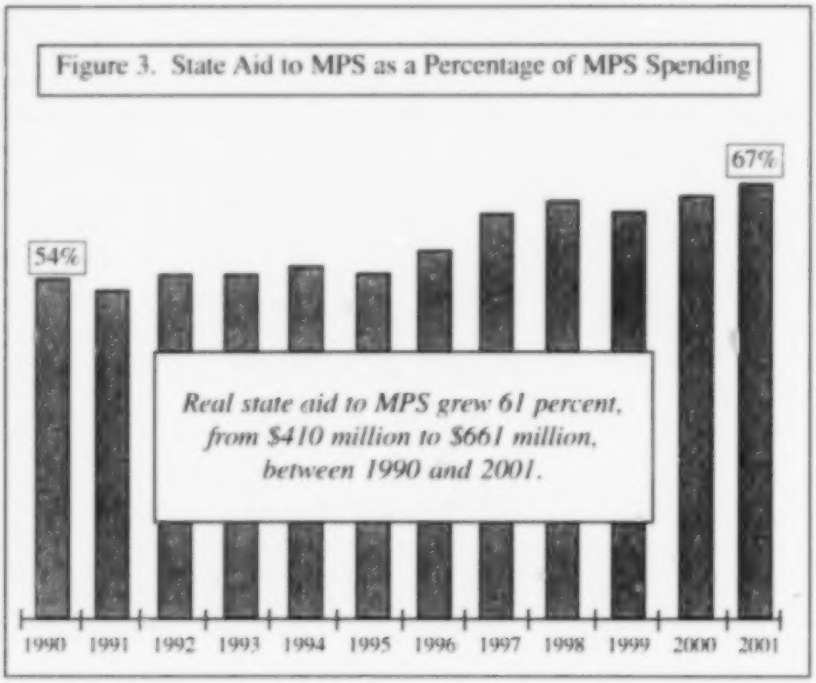
In terms of total spending and per pupil spending, MPS has experienced substantial increases during the eleven years of the MPCP's existence. Figure 2 on the next page shows this.[11]

11 Data in Figure 2 and Figure 3 are from MPS Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports, adjusted for inflation.



Theoretically, the undisputed spending growth shown in Figure 2 could have occurred even if the state had cut educational aid to MPS. But, that only could have been accomplished by sharp increases in local taxes. Indeed, some MPCP opponents have even suggested that MPS was forced to use a "voucher property tax" to deal with state aid "reductions."

Once again, the data show otherwise. Figure 3 on the next page tracks state educational aid to MPS as a percent of all MPS spending. Far from declining, real state aid to MPS grew 61 percent in the last eleven years. As a result, the state's share of the MPS budget increased to 67 percent from 54 percent. This has allowed local education property taxes to decline.



Academic Achievement

While public and political arguments about Milwaukee make presumptions about enrollment and finances, academic and journalistic debate has focused primarily on learning. There is growing, though not complete, agreement that many low-income students who use educational vouchers benefit academically. A recent Brookings Institution report characterizes the overall findings of scholarly research on vouchers: "Although controversial, research generally shows positive effects for students using vouchers to attend private schools."[12]

In terms of the largest number of students, and the greatest effect on an entire city's population, the more important issue is the effect of external options on schools and students who remain within traditionally defined public schools.

In terms of the largest number of students, and the greatest effect on an entire city's population, the more important issue is the effect of external options on schools and students who remain within traditionally defined public schools. None of these debates, however, should obscure the urgent crisis: educational engagement as measured by enrollment, attendance, and graduation, and academic achievement as measured by grades, test scores, and post-graduate success remain tragically too low among low-income and racial minority students in all educational sectors.

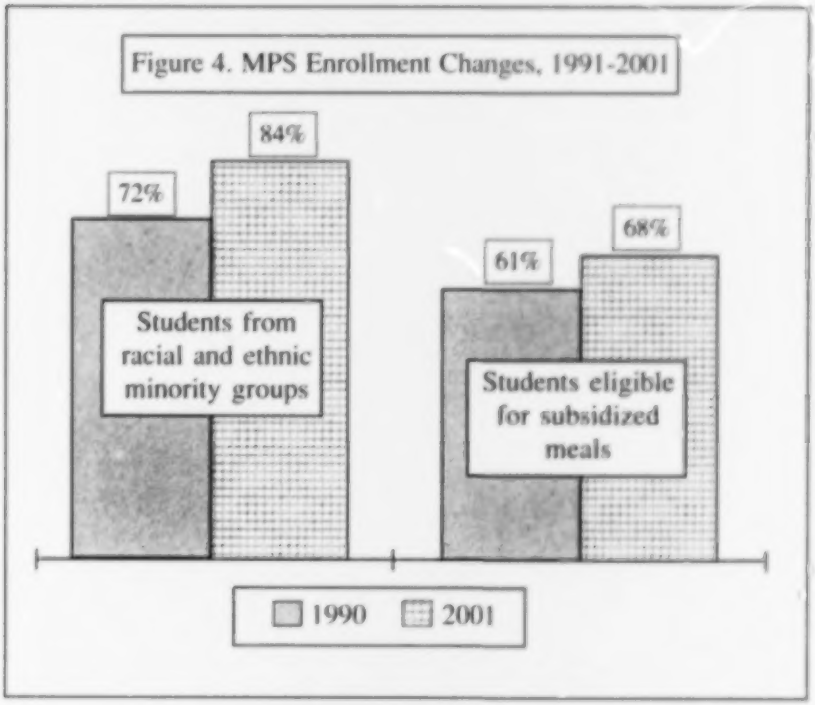
Overall learning results have been obscured by clamorous attention to year-to-year changes on individual subjects such as math, or on particular tests such as the Wis-

12 Tom Loveless, "How Well Are American Students Learning?" The 2001 Brown Center Report on American Education, Brookings Institution, September 2001.

consin Third-Grade Reading Test. From the perspective of all subjects, at all grade levels, over many years, MPS academic achievement has significantly and conclusively improved. Amazingly, this has occurred during the most rapid years of MPCP expansion, when choice opponents predicted the opposite outcome.

Perhaps more important, the largest gains have occurred in schools with the greatest number of low-income students, most of whom are members of racial and ethnic minority groups, with no complementary decline for schools with more affluent or white enrollments. These gains, described in the following charts, are all the more significant given changes in the socioeconomic background of the MPS student body.

Figure 4 below shows the growing percentage of MPS students from low- and moderate-income families and the rising percentage of students who belong to racial and ethnic minority groups.



From the perspective of all subjects, in all grade levels, over many years, MPS academic achievement has significantly and conclusively improved.

Given the historical experience in MPS and other urban public school districts, this changing demographic picture could have been correlated with possible declines in achievement. That certainly is what many critics of the MPCP predicted.

However, based on standardized tests administered to MPS students and a representative national sample of students, most MPS scores in math, science, reading, language arts, and social studies rose, rather than declined, between 1996-97 through 2000-01.[13]

13 The State of Wisconsin tested Wisconsin public school students on what are called the Wisconsin

Tests that allow for a comparison to students nationwide were administered to 4th, 8th, and 10th graders in math, science, reading, language arts, and social studies. Between 1996-97 and 2000-01, MPS students improved their national ranking in eleven of fifteen possible areas, as shown in Table 2 below.

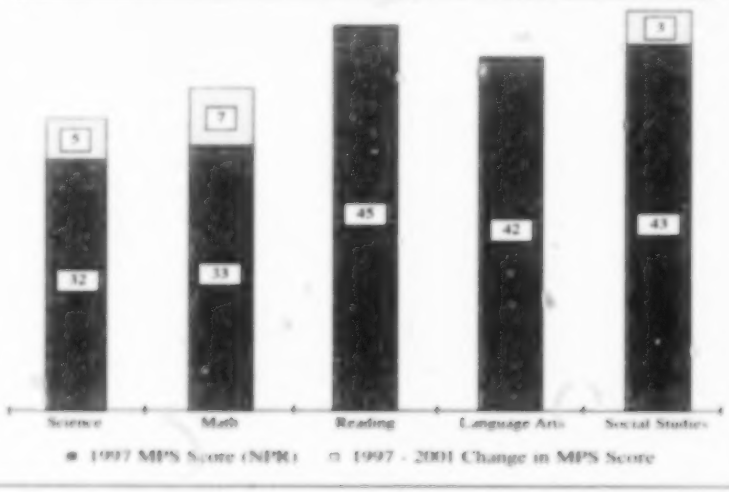
Between 1996-97 and 2000-01, MPS students improved their national ranking in eleven of fifteen possible areas.

Table 2. Change in MPS Student Scores, Compared to a National Sample, between 1996-97 and 2000-01

	Math	Science	Reading	Language Arts	Social Studies
4th	higher	higher	no change	no change	higher
8th	higher	higher	lower	higher	lower
10th	higher	higher	higher	higher	higher

Figures 5-7 show the range of these changes.

Figure 5. Change in 4th Grade MPS Test Scores, National Percentile Ranking, 1997 v. 2001 (Scale = 1-99)



Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), given annually at grades four, eight, and ten. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: "The WKCE measures achievement in reading, language, mathematics, science, and social studies using multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Results are compared to state and national averages...of students taking the tests at the same time of year and under the same conditions. They are also compared to set standards called proficiency standards [that] indicate how well students have learned the knowledge and skills tested."

A national percentile ranking (NPR) compares MPS scores with a representative national sample of students. NPR scores are reported on a scale of 1-99. These comparative data are available (and provided in this report) on the reading, language, mathematics, science, and social studies tests. No national comparisons are available for the writing exam. See http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/oea/wsasintr.html for additional information.

Figure 6. Change in 8th Grade MPS Test Scores, National Percentile Ranking, 1997 v. 2001 (Scale = 1-99)

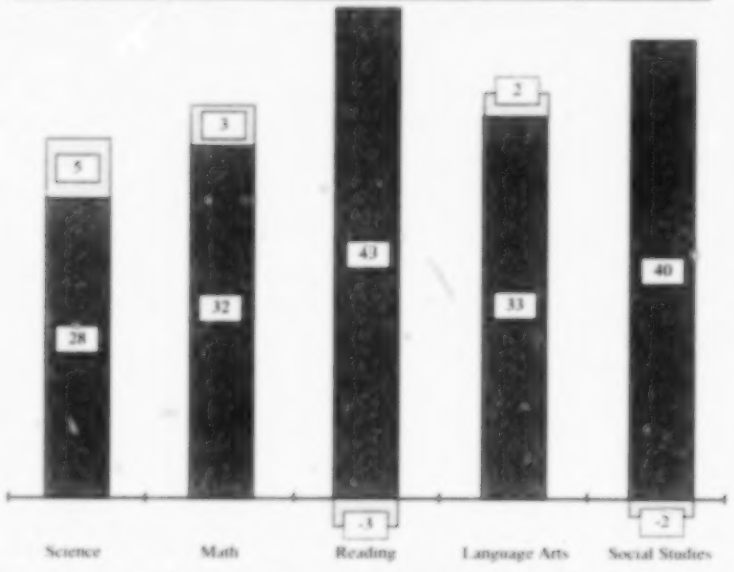
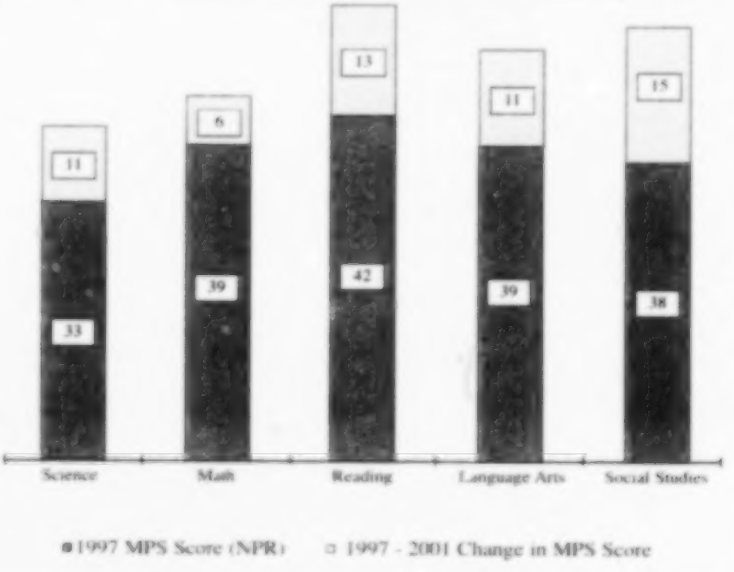


Figure 7. Change in 10th Grade MPS Test Scores, National Percentile Ranking, 1997 v. 2001 (Scale = 1-99)



Since 1997-98, students taking the WKCE tests also have been ranked as to whether their performance is "minimal," "basic," "proficient," or "advanced." Table 3 below shows that the percent of MPS students scoring proficient or advanced increased in all fifteen areas between 1997-98 and 2000-01.

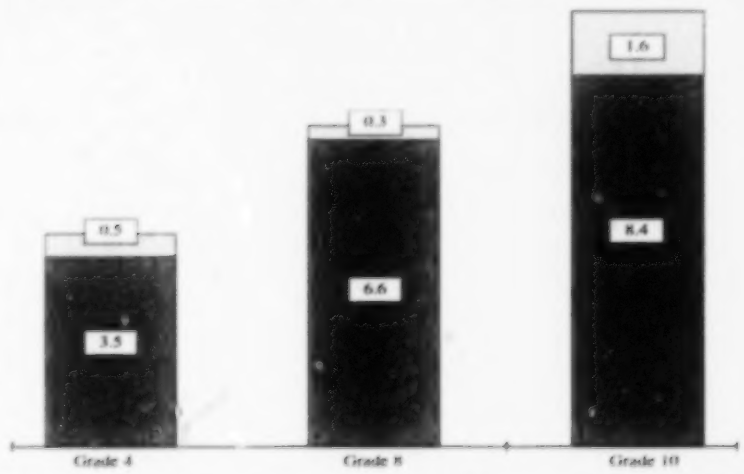
Table 3. Percent of MPS Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on WKCE Tests, 1997-98 and *2000-01*

	Math	Science	Reading	Language Arts	Social Studies
4th	21 - *36*	25 - *41*	41 - *53*	16 - *43*	27 - *51*
8th	32 - *35*	16 - *19*	27 - *37*	5 - *28*	32 - *39*
10th	7 - *11*	10 - *16*	27 - *35*	9 - *27*	27 - *37*

Another measure of how students performed on these tests is the "grade equivalent" score. It represents the years of school completed by students in a national sample who had a similar score.[14] Between 1997 and 2001, MPS grade equivalent scores rose an average of 0.5, 0.3, and 1.6 years, respectively, for 4th, 8th, and 10th grade students. See Figure 8.

Between 1997 and 2001, MPS grade equivalent scores rose an average of 0.5, 0.3, and 1.6 years, respectively, for 4th, 8th, and 10th grade students.

Figure 8. Change in Average MPS Grade Equivalent Scores, 1997 v. 2001



14 According to the MPS Office of Research and Assessment, "grade equivalents range from 0.0 to 12.9, representing thirteen years of school (K-12)...If a [student] has a grade equivalent of 4.8...it means *only* that the student's performance on *this* test is typical [of] performance of students who had completed eight months of Grade 4.

V. Cause and Effect

The system-wide achievement data described in Tables 1-2 and Figures 5-8 refute the notion that academic achievement declined, especially in the years of greatest school choice expansion. These data do not directly address whether competition or other factors associated with expanded school choice actually caused higher achievement. That question is addressed in important, peer-reviewed research published recently by noted Harvard economist Caroline M. Hoxby.[15]

Hoxby, who also is affiliated with the National Bureau of Economic Research, investigated the impact on "public school productivity" of various forms of school choice. In Milwaukee, she analyzed: MPS schools most likely to have been affected by competition; those less likely to have been affected by competition; and a control group of demographically similar Wisconsin public schools not exposed to vouchers.

She found that, "Overall, an evaluation of Milwaukee suggests that public schools have a strong, positive response to competition from vouchers....[S]chools that faced the most potential competition from vouchers had the best productivity response."

Taken together, the quantifiable evidence in Sections IV and V shows that the MPCP and other programs that expand educational options have had a positive impact on Milwaukee's public schools.

Taken together, the quantifiable evidence in Sections IV and V shows that the MPCP and other programs that expand educational options have had a positive impact on Milwaukee's public schools. School choice was neither the exclusive nor, in some cases, primary reason why MPS increased enrollment and funding while improving academic achievement. Less crowded schools, lower class sizes, increased accountability, school accountability and improvements in both school design and curriculum all played major parts. But none of these improvements would have happened without the impact of expanded parental options that transformed public education to a multi-sector delivery system.

These apparent benefits increasingly have been noted by Milwaukee's major paper, *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, where editors and reporters once expressed considerable skepticism about the school choice movement.

- A November 15, 2000, *Journal Sentinel* story listed several MPS schools that had sought, and received, "more freedom to shape their programs than traditional [public] schools." The paper explained: "The schools clearly were aiming to reshape themselves to be more appealing in a more competitive school market."

---

15 Caroline Hoxby, "School Choice and School Productivity (Or, Could School Choice be a Tide that Lifts All Boats?)," *Education Next*, Winter 2001.

- On November 28, 2000, *The Journal Sentinel* cited changes in "the fundamental realities of how many [public] schools operate in Milwaukee." It described "decisions to make schools more independent, more innovative, more attuned to their communities - and, most of all, more popular with parents in an era where Milwaukee parents have more choices for publicly funded education than perhaps anyone in American history."

- A January 7, 2001, story by the paper's senior education reporter said, "the spirit of choice is permeating the Milwaukee Public School[s]…[S]chools are trying with once-unthinkable earnestness to win over parents."

- A January 23, 2001, editorial said, "Milwaukee's choice program [has] put pressure on Milwaukee Public Schools to improve."

"Parents have the right and responsibility to determine the course of their children's education. As members of the Board of MPS, our task is to support them in carrying out that responsibility."

MPS statements and actions reaffirm the trend. An unexpected enrollment increase in 2001-02 is in part explained by an extensive campaign in early 2001 to encourage parents to choose public schools. The campaign included radio, newspaper and television ads, a 30-minute infomercial about the district, billboards, and district-wide open houses.

Describing the campaign, MPS Superintendent Spence Korte readily agreed that the district was trying to be competitive, saying: "Like many other monopolistic operations, you get a little bit complacent when you're the only game in town…We needed to be able to compete, to really get better, and to be more sensitive to what parents are telling us they need."[16] In another interview, Korte said, "We are dedicating ourselves to make sure that public schools know how to reach out and know how to serve families, and we're the logical place for people to start for their educational programs. We hope they'll give us a good look."[17]

Korte's statements reaffirm the 1997 testimony of all nine members, including six endorsed by the Milwaukee teachers' union, in a fund-raising appeal for PAVE (Partners Advancing Values in Education), a Milwaukee-based private scholarship fund:

> For the last two years, the Board of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has made "First Choice Within MPS" our primary goal…. Despite these efforts, waiting lists for our good schools continue to grow. Low-income and minority students remain especially disadvantaged by a lack of excellent choices within MPS.
>
> Parents have the right and responsibility to determine the course of their children's education. As members of the Board of MPS, our task is to support them in carrying out that responsibility.
>
> Regardless of our individual views about school choice, we believe PAVE's effort to afford disadvantaged families their first choice for quality education is a critical initiative not only to help thousands of poor families but to support the reforms MPS is trying to make.[18]

16 Patty Lowe, "The School Down the Block," on "Weekend," Wisconsin Public Television, WMVS-TV, Milwaukee, January 12, 2001.

17 Our Lights are On for You," interview with Milwaukee Public Schools Superintendent Spence Korte, WTMJ-TV, Milwaukee, January 10, 2001.

18 September 10, 1997, letter from all nine members of the MPS Board of School Directors to "Dear Friends of Public Education in Milwaukee," quoted in *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 14, 1997.

CONCLUSION

Milwaukee's public schools - district, cross-district, independent and religious – have redefined, expanded, and strengthened public education.

The ideological conflict between "conservative" and "liberal" dogmatists who dispute "free market" and "private" alternatives to "public" education is fundamentally misplaced and irrelevant to the facts. From colonial beginnings to this day, governmental, independent, religious, and home schools have always provided American public education. American public education has always been multi-sector; the issue is whether we will acknowledge it.

Analytic frameworks have been as inappropriate as the debate itself. Neither market theory nor political science alone explain either public education or the Milwaukee experiment, for public education operates as a political economy in which markets and politics are inextricably linked.

Debates pitting resources against effectiveness, or education against other institutional sectors, are equally misplaced. Poor children and poor cities obviously need better facilities, better teachers, and the safeties, amenities, and qualities that America's richest and most privileged families take for granted. Parents, employers, voluntary associations, and communities clearly need to assume their necessary responsibilities if faculties are to teach, students learn, and public education succeed.

Milwaukee's public school revolution challenges the nation to recognize that our accustomed definition of "public education" is both historically inaccurate and operationally ineffective.

Yet no amount of building, funding, or collaborating will make much difference if the fundamental delivery vehicle is wrong. Milwaukee's public school revolution challenges the nation to recognize that our accustomed definition of "public education" is both historically inaccurate and operationally ineffective. Better buildings, more money, and escalating licensure requirements alone have failed. Facilities, funds, and faculties require an effective framework to function. That framework is the tax-funded, free-of-charge, multi-sector delivery of enough options, sufficiently diverse in cultures and curricula, to offer every parent the variety of choices that every family needs, so that all children get the public education they deserve. The evidence of Milwaukee's revolution is clear: in the right framework, markets will serve the poor and two-party politics will begin competing to produce. Milwaukee's public schools are larger, stronger, and richer today because of school choice's political challenge and market competition. So is Milwaukee's major public education player – Milwaukee Public Schools.

It is time to get on to the real task at issue. It is unacceptable to debate for another decade, generation, or century about the appropriate institutional vehicles to afford

the instruction and enculturation required to address racial, urban, social, and labor market crises. It is time we got past the religious, racial, and linguistic divisions and bigotries that have historically subverted our understanding of public education. The most important division among schools is not religious or secular, denominational or interfaith, governmental or independent, private or public, but good and bad. Good schools are safe, nurturing, challenging, disciplined and effective. Bad schools aren't. The more urgent and appropriate challenge is addressing the persistent inequities that mean most poor children, in most American cities, will still never learn to read, write, or calculate well enough to function as citizens, workers, or parents.

Nothing is more pressing, progressive, or just than making those skills possible for all our children; especially for poor children who deserve, more than anyone, public education worthy of its proud history and name.

About the Author

John Gardner is the sole citywide elected representative on the nine-member Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Board of Directors. The other eight directors are elected by district.

He describes his educational philosophy this way:

> My bias is that of a left-wing organizer with thirty years' work for labor unions, public interest groups, community organizations, consumer and workers' cooperatives, and most recently, schools. It is also that of a radical democrat who believes conventional "liberal" and "conservative" economic dogmas mythologize and justify constituent self-interests more than they explicate historical process or institutional reality. Finally, it is that of a passionate partisan of American public education which, with all its faults and limits, richly deserves the place it has assumed in national civil religion as prerequisite fundament for democratic promise.
>
> My vantage point is that of an outside, increasingly furious parent activist from the time my first son's admission to public schools was rejected in 1982 until 1995, when I was first elected the only at-large, or citywide, member of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Board of School Directors. From 1995, when the Wisconsin legislature expanded the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), and from 1997, when the legislature authorized the current expansion of Milwaukee's charter schools, I have been both player and observer in MPS's response to these initiatives. As an MPS board member, I have served as chair of its Personnel and Strategic Planning and Budget committees, chair of the board-appointed Special Committee on Available Facilities, as vice-chair of the Legislation, Rules and Policy Committee, and member of every board committee. Most important, my three sons are proud, loyal beneficiaries of Milwaukee Public Schools.
>
> My argument is necessarily testimonial as well as expository. My perspective cannot escape the inevitably distorted, but occasionally uniquely revealing, vantage of someone who has attempted, largely without success, to improve MPS from the outside; been intimate party to MPS's responses to the challenges and opportunities of the new Milwaukee paradigm; and who has, with my wife and neighbors, raised three sons on an inner-city block where, during our residency since 1986, eight young people have been murdered.

"My bias is that of a left-wing organizer with thirty years' work for labor union, public interest groups, community organizations, consumer and workers' cooperatives, and most recently, schools."

Gardner, the second most senior member of the board, was elected in 1995 with 52% of the citywide vote. He was re-elected in 1999 with 60% of the citywide vote. His 1999 victory margin was the largest ever recorded in a citywide MPS election.

A native of New York City, Gardner attended public schools in both the City and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Nyack, New York, and graduated from Nyack High School in 1966. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Columbia University in 1970 and a Master of Arts in American History from Brandeis University in 1972.

Gardner's background includes thirty years' experience as an organizer for labor unions, community organizations, cooperatives, and public interest groups. His experience includes field office and boycott organizing for the United Farm Workers Union, AFL-CIO. He previously served as Director of Organizing for New York City anti-redlining projects sponsored by the New York Public Interest Research Group. He also developed curriculum and employment programs at New York City's LaGuardia Community College and Malcolm-King: Harlem College Extension.

In 1996 Gardner co-authored a Living Wage Ordinance that set $7.70 an hour as the minimum wage for all employees contracted by the Milwaukee Public Schools. He has been active in promoting universal health insurance, higher minimum wage and earned income tax credits, and other programs and policies that help working people live and raise families in decent standards.

Gardner is married to Julie Kerksick, Executive Director of the precedent-setting New Hope Project, an employment demonstration project. Their oldest son, a junior at the University of Chicago, graduated from MPS, which their two younger sons still attend.

AMERICAN EDUCATION REFORM COUNCIL

The American Education Reform Council (AERC) is a nonprofit organization that seeks to provide information about the impact of public and private parental choice programs.

Based in Milwaukee, AERC draws on the experience of staff who have worked with parental choice programs for up to a decade. AERC also has accumulated substantial data and research that it makes available to interested persons.

AERC believes that accurate and credible information about parental choice is essential to productive discussion and debate. To this end, AERC works with persons across the country to assist them to develop such information and to provide models based on experience in Wisconsin, Ohio, and other states.

AERC has found that one of the most effective ways to demonstrate the impact of parent choice on a community is to invite interested persons to visit Milwaukee. AERC has helped organize tours for groups from New York, Texas, New Mexico, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Michigan and other states. Visitors tour schools, hear a wide range of speakers, and ask questions.

The AERC board is listed below:

William Oberndorf
San Francisco, CA

Betsy DeVos
Grand Rapids, MI

Arne Carlson
Minneapolis, MN

John Fisher
San Francisco, CA

Howard Fuller
Milwaukee, WI

Susan Mitchell, President
Milwaukee, WI

John Walton
Jackson Hole, WY

AMERICAN EDUCATION REFORM COUNCIL

2025 NORTH SUMMIT AVENUE, SUITE 103 • MILWAUKEE, WI 53202

(414) 319-9160 • FAX (414) 765-0220

aerc@parentchoice.org